From the Desk *of the* **President**

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Global Tourism Resilience Day 2025

Honoring Our Strengths While Building Resilience

Dr. Origin Deleveaux, Jr., DD, MSc, JP, Commander
President, Bahamas Military and Maritime Academy (BMMA)

On this Global Tourism Resilience Day, we reflect on the vital role tourism plays in The Bahamas' economic stability, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. In 2024, The Bahamas achieved unprecedented tourism growth, welcoming 11.22 million international visitors, surpassing the 9.65 million arrivals in 2023.

This remarkable increase is a testament to the outstanding work and collaboration of the Government of The Bahamas, the Ministry of Tourism, airport and port authorities, hospitality and transportation sectors, and all tourism stakeholders whose dedication and innovation have positioned The Bahamas as a leading global destination.

While these numbers reflect global confidence in The Bahamas as a destination, they also underscore the urgent need for tourism resilience—the ability to withstand economic shifts, climate risks, and technological disruptions while evolving strategically for long-term sustainability.

What Does Resilience in Tourism Mean Today?

Tourism resilience is no longer about rebounding from crises—it is about proactively redefining how The Bahamas remains competitive in a changing world. We must ask:

- How do we adapt in an era where AI, automation, and digital transformation are reshaping industries?
- How do we engage the next generation in tourism, safeguarding its viability as a career and economic driver?
- How do we integrate sustainability and entrepreneurship to fortify our economy for the long term?

BMMA, through its Security and Sustainability Research Institute (SSRI), is uniquely positioned

to drive the forward-thinking research, workforce development, and policy strategy necessary for The Bahamas to lead in tourism resilience.

Evolving Trends & The Need for a New Tourism Paradigm

The tourism industry, while strong, is not immune to global economic fluctuations, technological disruption, or environmental challenges. The Caribbean, as a region, remains highly vulnerable—dependent on external travel demand, shifting economic policies, and global climate impacts.

Climate, Environmental Challenges, & Tourism Infrastructure

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), The Bahamas faces heightened climate risks that

directly impact tourism:

- Rising sea levels threaten coastal hotels, infrastructure, and cultural landmarks.
- Coral reef degradation due to ocean warming weakens marine biodiversity, affecting diving tourism and shoreline protection.
- Stronger, more frequent hurricanes require greater investment in resilient infrastructure and sustainable tourism models.

While climate adaptation is crucial, so too is reinforcing alignment between our tourism

infrastructure, supply chains, and economic strategies with a long-term sustainability vision.

The Government of The Bahamas has demonstrated a strong commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to climate action (SDG 13), life below water (SDG 14), and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8). In 2014, the nation

initiated its 25-year National Development Plan: Vision 2040, aligning its objectives with the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure a cohesive approach to national progress.

In a significant move to bolster marine conservation and climate resilience, The Bahamas announced in November 2024 a plan to refinance $300 million of its external debt. This

innovative debt-for-nature swap is set to allocate over $120 million towards marine conservation

projects and climate change mitigation efforts. The initiative aims to protect vital ecosystems

such as mangroves and seagrasses, which are essential for carbon sequestration and support the nation's fisheries, contributing substantially to the economy.

Furthermore, The Bahamas has established a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister. This unit serves as the coordinating body for training, implementation, and execution of the government's vision for sustainable development, ensuring that all prioritized projects align with the Sustainable Development Strategy.

These strategic actions underscore The Bahamas' dedication to integrating sustainable practices within its tourism sector and broader economic strategies, aiming to enhance resilience against climate-related challenges while promoting long-term prosperity.

Economic Dependency, Digital Market Shifts & Financial Innovation

The Government of The Bahamas has consistently invested in enhancing tourism and tourism support services, including airport infrastructure, to bolster economic development. The current $70 million Family Island Airport Renaissance Project, funded by the Saudi Fund for Development, prioritizes Exuma International Airport and aims to improve connectivity, passenger capacity, and access to essential services across the islands. This initiative represents part of an ongoing commitment to modern infrastructure that supports the nation's long-term economic resilience and growth (PR Newswire, 2023; BMP Sports Events, 2024; InfraPPP World, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Tourism and financial services are pivotal to The Bahamas' economy, with tourism contributing approximately 50% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and financial services contributing between 15% and 20%. Together, these sectors, along with other services such as retail and wholesale trade, account for approximately 85% of the country's GDP. (Bahamas.gov.bs, 2024; PwC, 2024; Economy.com, 2024).

To remain resilient, The Bahamas must:

- Expand tourism-linked industries beyond hospitality to include digital tourism markets, fintech solutions, and sustainability-driven enterprises.
- Modernize financial systems to support the monetization of new tourism products,

including virtual tourism, cultural content creation, and digital entrepreneurship.

Tourism is no longer about visitors physically arriving—it is also about how we facilitate global transactions for Bahamian innovators, digital entrepreneurs, and eco-tourism providers. This requires modern payment gateways, digital-friendly banking, and blockchain-based financial systems to support a resilient, financially inclusive tourism sector. The Government of The Bahamas has also embraced digital transformation by launching the Sand Dollar, the world's first central bank digital currency, and enacting the Digital Assets and Registered Exchanges (DARE) Act.

These initiatives support Bahamian innovators, digital entrepreneurs, and eco-tourism providers with modern payment gateways and blockchain-based financial systems, preparing the tourism sector for a resilient and inclusive digital future.

Engaging the Next Generation: The Shift from Traditional Tourism Careers Why Workforce Transformation is Critical

With 41% of companies worldwide expecting job reductions due to AI by 2030, younger generations will not engage in tourism the same way past generations have. BMMA's role in education and workforce development is to redefine career paths within tourism, equipping Bahamian youth to thrive in a future-proof industry. (World Economic Forum, 2025, technologymagazine.com)

New Career Pathways for Tourism Resilience

To maintain its economic and employment viability, tourism must integrate new disciplines that align with the evolving digital economy:

- **AI & Automation in Hospitality** – Preparing future tourism professionals to manage AIenhanced guest services, virtual tour experiences, and data-driven travel solutions.
- **Cybersecurity & Digital Protection** – Protecting airline navigation systems, hotel infrastructures, and financial transactions from cyber threats.
- **Content Creation & Virtual Tourism** Enabling Bahamian artisans, guides, and historians to generate revenue through digital platforms, interactive storytelling, and AI-powered cultural education.

Looking to the Future: Government and BMMA Initiatives

As The Bahamas looks to the future, the government and the Bahamas Military and Maritime Academy (BMMA) are proactively

implementing initiatives to enhance tourism resilience and national development.

Government Initiatives

- **Infrastructure Development**: The Bahamian government has committed $44 million to develop Exuma International Airport, including constructing a new terminal building, fire rescue facility, and runway upgrades (en.wikipedia.org).
- **Diversification of Tourism Offerings**: Efforts are underway to promote boutique hotels, Airbnb-style accommodations, and niche markets such as medical, wellness, religious, culinary, and environmental tourism (bahamas.gov.bs).
- **Sustainable Development**: The National Development Plan: Vision 2040 serves as a policy framework for long-term economic growth and environmental stewardship (bahamas.gov.bs).

BMMA's Contributions

- **Educational Excellence**: BMMA is committed to addressing challenges like workforce adaptation, climate resilience, and food security (rbdf.gov.bs).
- Strategic Partnerships: BMMA is exploring partnerships with international institutions such as Edinburgh Napier University to enhance training and development (). (Royal Bahamas Defence Force, 2024, rbdf.gov.bs)

The image above highlights BMMA leadership in discussions with Edinburgh Napier University

The Role of BMMA & The SSRI in National Resilience

The Bahamas Military and Maritime Academy (BMMA) plays a critical role in national security, economic stability, and sustainable development. In an era of climate volatility, technological disruption, and shifting global markets, strategic resilience is imperative—not just for tourism,

but for the nation's long-term sustainability.

The Security & Sustainability Research Institute (SSRI) at BMMA serves as a dedicated research

and strategic analysis arm, advancing knowledge and policy solutions at the intersection of

economic resilience, workforce transformation, and sustainability. The SSRI's work aligns with

key global and regional priorities, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

Caribbean regional strategies, and national security imperatives.

Key Areas of SSRI Research & Strategic Focus

• **Tourism & Climate Resilience Research** – Examining the impact of climate change on tourism-dependent economies, developing adaptive strategies for coastal preservation,

and promoting eco-tourism and infrastructure resilience.

• **AI & Workforce Transformation Studies** – Investigating how AI, automation, and

digital transformation are reshaping employment landscapes and identifying new pathways for workforce upskilling within tourism and related industries

.• **Economic Diversification & Policy Innovation** – Researching emerging industries, alternative financing mechanisms, and digital economies, strengthening The Bahamas' ability to remain competitive and financially resilient in a rapidly evolving global market.

• **Blue, Green & Orange Economies Integration** – Advancing strategies that connect marine-based industries, sustainable agriculture, and creative entrepreneurship with

tourism, fostering long-term economic self-sufficiency and innovation.

Why This Research Matters

Tourism does not exist in isolation—it is interconnected with economic policies, national

security strategies, and the well-being of citizens. The SSRI prioritizes cutting-edge research,

data-driven insights, and cross-sector collaborations to guide policy decisions that support The Bahamas' long-term sustainability and resilience.

Tourism resilience is not just about adaptation—it is about transformation. By integrating technology, sustainability, and economic innovation, The Bahamas can lead in defining the next era of tourism rather than reacting to external forces.

Conclusion: A Call to Action for a Sustainable Future

As we celebrate The Bahamas' continued tourism success, we must also take bold steps toward securing an industry that remains viable, secure, and innovative. Tourism resilience requires a multi-disciplinary, forward-thinking approach—one that BMMA, through the SSRI, is committed to developing.

To all RBDF service members, as you anticipate the official launch of BMMA, know that this institution is positioned to shape the next generation of leaders, innovators, and defenders of national resilience.

Past models will not dictate the future of tourism. Instead, we must build a new vision—one that solidifies The Bahamas' position as a global leader, not just a destination.

Sincerely,

Dr. Origin Deleveaux, Jr., DD MSc, JP.,
Commander President, Bahamas Military and Maritime Academy (BMMA)

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